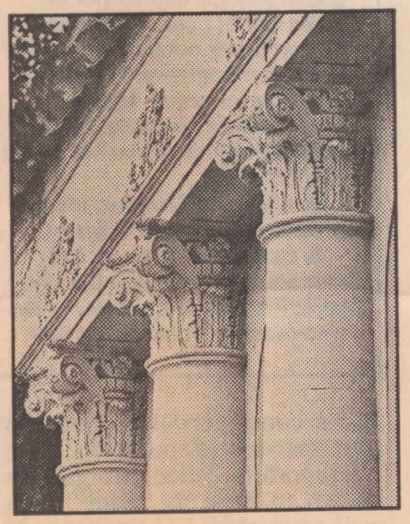
'I hate to see it go. It was a beautiful building.'

Coral Gables police Capt. CHUCK SCHERER
on the demolition of the Coral Gables Coliseum



SHORT REPRIEVE: Columns on the Coliseum's south side, which survived Monday's demolition, show traces of grand days.

Landmark reduced to souvenirs

By DONNA GEHRKE
Herald Staff Writer

More than three generations ago, the boxy Coral Gables Coliseum opened to glorious fanfare: Folk hero Will Rogers hosted a celebration that drew more than 11,000 people.

Few came to the empty building Monday, except to snap pictures as crews worked to demolish the once-grand concert hall.

By the end of the week, the 66-year-old Coliseum is likely to be a pile of rubble.

"I hate to see it go," said Coral Gables police Capt. Chuck Scherer. "It was a beautiful building."

He spent his lunch hour watching bulldozers climb over concrete and steel rubble, once the Coliseum's north wall.

The Coliseum is part of Scherer's childhood. He skated there when it was converted

PLEASE SEE **COLISEUM, 3B**

CHUCK FADELY / Miami Herald Staf

END OF AN AGE: Conrad St.-Jean hoses down debris Monday to control dust amid the ruins as the north wall of the Coral Gables Coliseum on Douglas Avenue comes down.

CORAL GABLES COLISEUM: THE RISE AND FALL

Coral Gables founder George Merrick envisioned the Coliseum, 1500 Douglas Rd., as a major convention and entertainment center. He never fulfilled that dream. He sold it unfinished to the city of Coral Gables in 1927.

It opened as the Miami Coliseum that same year and changed uses several times before it met the wrecking ball this week:

1940: Leased to Embry-Riddle Corp., and used for training future military pilots.

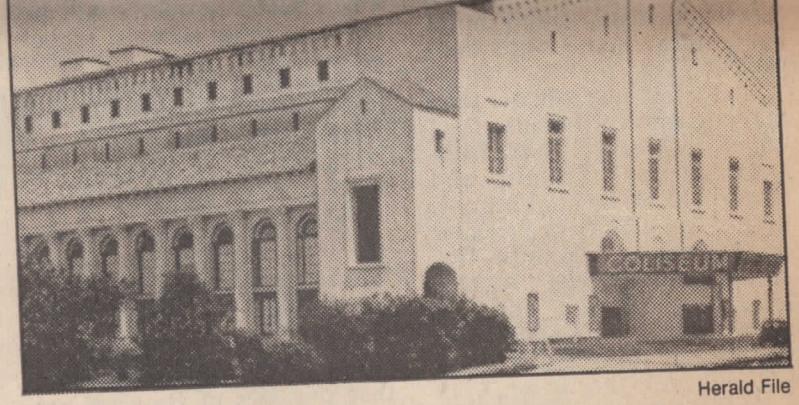
1949: Sold to Holiday on Ice and operated as a skating rink and headquarters for a skating troupe that toured the nation.

1957: Sold to Harold Vineberg, who still is one of the owners. He converted it into a 30-lane bowling alley called Coliseum Lanes.

1977: Leased to Racquetball International Corp., which operated the building as Sportrooms — a super gym with 24 racquetball courts and other amenities.

1987: Sportrooms went bankrupt, and the building was left vacant.

July 1993: Demolition begins to make room for a new Service Merchandise store.



Herald File

BOXY STYLE: Plans to save the 66-year-old Coliseum, built to last with 150-foot-long steel beams, never surfaced.